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WASHINGTON AND NAPOLEON

A FRAGMENT.

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By
Dr. Francis Lieber.

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A portion of this paper formed originally part of an article in Putnam's Magazine, inscribed, "Was Napoleon a Dictator?" The discussion of this question was elicited by certain letters, some of which are contained in the officially published Correspondence of the Emperor Napoleon with his Brother Joseph; and others of which belong to a collection of letters addressed by Joseph Bonaparte to the writer of these pages.

The paper as now offered was written for the Metropolitan Fair, in the hope of promoting, in some degree, its patriotic object.

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The emperor himself was desirous of having his reign considered a dictatorship. This was at least the case in his exile, where, as it is well known and was natural, he occupied himself with his own name, as it would be judged by posterity. On that distant rock where he died in exile he existed, though still in this life, yet removed from the living generation over which he had ruled ; no man like him has stepped, still living, into the Past. Everything was extraordinary in this man—his end no less than his life. From the island in the southern hemisphere he could look upon his career which filled so large a portion of the northern, as a thing of history, completely closed ; and of no historic magnate have we records, official and private, so full as of him.

Napoleon alluded, on several occasions, to Washington, and on one of these he observed, that some people had said that he ought to have made himself a French Washington. "All that I was allowed to be," he said, "was a crowned Washington. For me to imitate Washington would have been a *niaiserie.*" He intended undoubtedly to convey the idea that the circumstances, in which he was placed, and France, as he found her, did not allow him to become a second Washington. This is obvious, but it is equally true that under no circumstances whatever would Napoleon have been a man like Washington—never could he have parted with power.

There are no two men in the whole compass of history more unlike than these two. There is, indeed, a double star in the firmament of history, the one component star of which is Washington, but his fellow-

star is not Napoleon ; it is William of Nassau, the founder of the Netherlands Republic, whom his countrymen did not attempt to call the Great, but who is named to this day Father William. Bonaparte, crowned or uncrowned, never was, and never could have been, a Washington. They were differently fashioned. The minds and souls of Washington and Napoleon differed no less than their bodies. The one was wholly Anglican or Teutonic, the other essentially of the modern Southern European type—not Latin, as the favorite phrase now goes. There was nothing Roman in Napoleon. The one was great and noble as a calm and persevering man of duty ; the other impetuous, flashing, full of brilliant genius. Washington has ever appeared to us as the greatest historic model of sound common sense and sterling judgment, coupled with immaculate patriotism, patient, just, and persevering, even to tenacity. Washington was not brilliant, but sound to the inmost recess of his large heart, and endowed with the Fabian genius of unyielding firmness under circumstances which would have sickened most men. Washington would forget his own self and had the divine gift of waiting. Napoleon, on the other hand, is probably the most brilliant character of modern times. Glory was his very idol. When his first laurels encircled his brow, and Europe stood amazed at his Italian victories, his saying, often repeated in despatches and addresses to his soldiers, was : " We shall do greater things yet." *Grandes choses*—things of great renown for all ages formed the constellation by which he shaped his course.

Washington was throughout his life a self-limiting man ; Napoleon was ever a self-stimulating man. The fever of grandeur—grandeur of name, grandeur of deeds—consumed him. Washington was modest ; Napoleon came to ruin by untamable pride. Washington was obedient to the law—a law-abiding man if ever there was one. Napoleon constantly broke down the law when it appeared necessary to him, and it appeared thus often. Washington aided in creating a new empire ; Napoleon aimed at creating a " new system"—a " new state of things." Washington helped politically to form a new nation, and gladly accepted the aid of his compeers ; Napoleon stepped in when France had long been politically nationalized, and when a fearful internal convulsion had intensified pre-existing centralization. Washington sought eagerly the

advice of his friends and companions—such as Hamilton and Madison. Napoleon looked upon himself as Destiny. Louis XIV. had said: "L'état c'est moi." We almost hear Napoleon say: "L'histoire c'est moi." Napoleon compared his career and his relation to his followers—the marshals and others—with those of Christ and Mohammed.* He ended, indeed, with repeating the self-deification of Alexander as closely as it could be done in the nineteenth century.

Washington arose out of a struggle for independence—a severance of colonies from a distant mother-country. Napoleon arose out of a fearful internal revolution. The former belonged to a revolution which consisted chiefly in the disavowal of allegiance to the crown of England, and left intact all the elementary institutions of political existence inherited from the mother-country; the latter succeeded to a revolution which rooted up the whole preceding polity except centralism.

Washington is daily growing in the affection of history, and there is a remarkable uniformity of opinion regarding his character, at home and abroad; there is the greatest difference of opinion regarding Napoleon's character, and however many may admire him, no one can be said to love his memory, except some survivors who have received acts of personal kindness at his hands. No one loves power merely because it is power. Could we even love God were He only almighty?

Yet Washington was not personally popular; his power consisted in the universal conviction that he could be confided in; an almost unlimited trust in his integrity and wisdom by soldier and by citizen, was his strength; but no endearing name was bestowed on him by his soldiers, or if it ever was done it did not adhere and has not become historical. Napoleon was worshipped by his soldiers, and received the soldierly nickname of the Little Corporal, as Old Fritz, Marshal Forward, and Old Hickory, were bestowed on Frederick the Great, on Prince Blücher, and on General Jackson, and adhered to them, so that the names passed over into history and into the songs of the Berangers and the Arndts. Yet again, while Washington was universally trusted, even

* For this statement we have two proofs: one in the Memoirs of the Duke of Ragusa, and the other in the Memorial de St. Hélene, which admits of no extenuating interpretation.

after a party had arisen which embittered the later years of his second presidential term, Joseph writes of his brother Napoleon, when endeavoring to make out that the emperor was, with all his absolutism, but a dictator arrogating all power in order to establish peace abroad and quiet at home : "Napoleon isolated himself much in France, and the people ended with no longer understanding what he was after."*

Washington seems to us to have been free from jealousy in a degree very rare in public men, and almost unknown in distinguished captains. Jealousy was active in Napoleon's mind, and signally shown on several occasions. Washington was eminently truthful, a point in which Wellington resembled him. Napoleon readily discarded truth when it served his purpose, and laid it down even as a rule that his generals should misstate facts on occasions which he pointed out. Washington declined his pay as commander-in-chief, and allowed Congress only to refund his actual expenses in the field, for which purpose he kept conscientiously minute accounts. Napoleon always drew largely on the public treasury. Washington, to the end of his life, wrote a remarkably free, bold, and legible hand ; Napoleon's handwriting became more illegible with every rising step, until some of his letters or directions embarrassed his ministers to such a degree that, after consultations, they had to recur again to the emperor, who was by no means put into an amiable mood on such occasions. Indeed, Washington's handwriting shows the calmness of the writer, and a proper regard for his fellow-men. Napoleon's later writing, although he wrote originally a legible hand, betrayed impetuous haste and an utter disregard of the intended reader.

Washington never persecuted ; he imprisoned no personal opponent, banished no personal enemy, and when he died, his hands, like those of Pericles, were unstained. Napoleon banished, imprisoned, and persecuted, and developed a system of police, which must be called stupendous on account of its vastness, power, and penetrating keenness—a system pressing to this day on France like an Alp, and which makes all that

* This fearful, although unconscious judgment, occurs in a letter of Joseph to Count Thibaudeau, p. 320, vol. x., of Memoirs and Correspondence, political as well as military, of King Joseph ; and so convinced does Joseph seem to have been of its truth, that he repeated this passage in a letter to the writer of the present paper.

Aristotle wrote on the police of usurpers appear as a feeble beginning of that essential branch of despotism. The Dionysian "sycophant" is a poor bungler compared to an agent of the French secret police, and this gigantic police system, with the whole gendarmerie and all the thousand ramifications in the different spheres of society, with a counter secret police, was developed with its stifling comprehensiveness under Napoleon, and is, unfortunately, more truly his own than the Code which bears his name.

Washington was strictly constitutional, and *institutional*, in his character; he never dreamed of concentration of power, however active and ardent he was in changing the inadequate Congress under the Articles of Confederation into a positive national government, under a national constitution, and however exalted an opinion he had of a cherished nationality. He called state sovereignty a monster, but he had no inclination whatever toward centralism—representation by one house, or an extinction of self-government in any sphere high or low. If Satan ever showed to him the glory and power of an earthly kingdom, it remained buried in his noble breast, and no act, no word of his, has betrayed even so much as a struggle to beat down the tempter. On the contrary, when malcontent officers intimated to him that he might rely on their support should he resolve to disperse Congress and make himself king, he promptly knew how to blend the sharpest rebuke with a gentlemanly forbearance toward his misguided and, perhaps, sorely tried comrades. Napoleon, on the other hand, expresses his surprise that nothing ever indicated a desire in Wellington to carve out a sovereignty for himself in the peninsula. How astonished would he have been at our Scott's refusal of a Mexican chief magistracy, and a feudal establishment of his army in the country.* Napoleon had no institutional instinct, no sympathy for self-government no conception even of civil liberty. The highest idea of liberty he seems ever to have conceived of is an appeal to universal suffrage for the grant of unlimited power.—Absolutism thus granted, the executive thus established, was in his mind the real representative of the people. He hated "parliamentarism;" representative

* See for an account of this interesting incident Lieber's Civil Liberty.

government was odious to him, and he called it aristocratic. True democracy was, according to him, to be found in absolutism based on an act of universal suffrage. This fundamental idea of Napoleon—now again paraded before the world—is given at length and with great precision and clearness by himself in a somewhat long exposition, forming one of his letters to the minister of foreign affairs, in the Correspondence of Napoleon I.* Instead of thinking how he might become one of the great institutors gratefully recorded by history, how he might sow the seeds of self-ruling institutions, which would survive him because the principle of self-government was inherent in them, he meditates how he can strike out new paths of brilliancy to make him and his people more glorious abroad, and how he can establish a polished despotism at home. His model of a policy was enlightened absorbing centralism—"all for the people, nothing by the people" (his early motto), with a strictly systematic administrative branch—claimed even now by his successor in throne speeches, as one of his uncle's most legitimate titles to undying glory. Napoleon seems to have been the representative and finisher of a period distinguished by aggressive criticism and demolition of past forms, rather than the beginner of an era of new institutions and fresh ideas.

Washington was a citizen, a statesman, a patriot, and also a soldier; Napoleon was a soldier above all other things, and gloried in being *un homme d'epée*. To be the greatest captain in history was the object of his greatest ambition. He compares himself to Cæsar, to Alexander. We think of citizens like Thrasybulus, Doria, or William of Nassau, when we seek for examples similar to Washington.

We Americans acknowledge that Washington plainly served his country, to which he bowed as the great thing above him and all others. The greatest admirers of Napoleon say that "soldiers, money, peoples, were in his hands but means to establish *un systême grandiose.*"† Washington never was a dictator, and never aimed at a dictatorship. Napo-

* On page 313, vol. iii.

† Words of the editors of Memoirs and Correspondence of Napoleon I., quoted here because they express what thousands say, and what pervades the whole ten volumes of the imperial correspondence.

leon occasionally claimed the title to explain or excuse his despotism or stringent centralism. Washington never compared himself to any one. Napoleon compares himself occasionally to him. Washington's policy was stricty domestic, and in leaving public life he urges the completest possible abstaining from foreign policy as one of the most important points of American statesmanship. Napoleon's policy became from year to year more foreign, until it ended almost exclusively in conquest and the revival of the obsolete idea of a universal monarchy, or at least of the absolute preponderance of France in Europe. The idea of a commonwealth of nations, linked together by the great law of nations—one of the most comprehensive ideas of modern civilization, and which is the application of the idea of self-government to the intercourse of nations—was spurned by him, and he tells us that had not the Russian disaster befallen him, he would have carried a long cherished plan of his into execution. According to this plan the princes of all the dynasties under the influence of France, should have been educated at Paris, under his eyes, and returned to their homes as what all the world probably would have called fit prefects of France, but what he called aids in his great system. Peace, according to him, was to be maintained in Europe only by the decided predominance of one power, and this power of course must be France, because far the most enlightened of all.

Washington and Napoleon were both men of strong will, as all great men must be, but Washington had also a correct heart, without which a strong will and fiery energy become only multipliers and co-efficients of evil. If we designate by the word "character" a combination of will and principle, Washington was a man of a great character. Napoleon may have had a stronger will than Washington. He certainly had a bolder will, while Washington had greater tenacity; but had Napoleon also goodness of heart and purity of purpose? A strong will without a good heart is even worse than keen logic without sound judgment.

Washington loved his country as an upright patriot, but we recollect no case in which his patriotism dimmed his conscientiousness. Napoleon placed, or pretended to place, France above all else. He did not think like Montesquieu, who said: "If I knew something useful to my country but injurious to Europe and to mankind, I should consider it a crime."

Washington was one of the beginners of the Revolution ; Napoleon steps in when the revolution of his country had already developed immense national forces. We believe Washington never changed his political convictions ; Napoleon commenced his career strongly tinctured with Jacobinism, and ended it as the embodiment of autocracy. He wrote, as a young officer, a very hot democratic paper, the copies of which were carefully suppressed at a later period.* If Washington's public acts were reduced to those of private life, that is to say, if the same motives were applied to the latter sphere, he would appear as an honorable, loyal, useful, and excellent neighbor and citizen. Napoleon would appear as an aggressive, restless, and difficult neighbor. Washington aimed at no elevation of his family, and dies a justice of the peace. Napoleon writes to Joseph : "I want a family of kings (*il me faut une famille de rois*)." Washington divests himself of the chief magistracy voluntarily and gracefully, leaving to his people a document which after-ages cherish like a political gospel. Napoleon, in his last days, is occupied with the idea of family aggrandizement and with the means by which his house may be prevented from mingling again with common men. He often spoke of it during his closing illness, and directs General Bertrand to advise, in his name, the members of his family to settle chiefly in Rome, where their children ought to be married to such princely families as the Colonnas, and where some Bonaparte would not fail to become Pope. Jerome and Caroline ought to reside in Switzerland, where, chiefly in Berne, they must establish themselves in the Swiss "oligarchy" (he uses this term), and where a landammanship would be certain to fall to the Bonapartes ; and the children of Joseph should remain in America—marry into the great families of the Washingtons and Jeffersons, and so a Bonaparte would soon become president of the United States.†

* A letter, addressed on September 6, 1795, by Napoleon to Joseph, in which he speaks of their brother Louis, has this characteristic and attractive passage :

"C'est un bon sujet ; mais aussi c'est de ma façon : chaleur, esprit, santé, talent, commerce exact, bonté, il réunit tout."—When Louis was King of Holland Napoleon spoke differently of him.

† It cannot be said that this extraordinary advice was owing to a failing mind. On the contrary, Bertrand, Montholon, and the other companions of Napoleon at St. Helena, state that his mind remained remarkably clear to the last day, and Bertrand says that the emperor spoke repeatedly of these desired family settlements.

May we continue after this passage? We wish, however, before closing this paper, to direct attention to a few points more.

Washington is one of the fairest instances of the gentleman, in the military as well as in the political, and in the international sphere. The character of the gentleman was at no period before the eyes of Napoleon, as a distinct type of modern humanity. Washington was appointed to the chief command by civilians, who had learned to honor his character as a fellow-member in the continental congress; Napoleon made each step toward the consulate and throne by the aid of the army and his military glory. Washington was great in not destroying, and brought back nothing that the people had abolished; Napoleon destroyed much that had been sown by the revolution, and re-established much that had been carefully destroyed. He boasted that he had maintained equality, yet he re-established nobility; he gloried in having made stable all the good which the revolution had tried to introduce, yet he tried to abolish again the trial by jury.* When Americans speak of Washington, they call him always a great and good man. Great and good have grown, regarding him, into one word, similar, in psychologic grammar, to the Kalokagathon of the Greeks, and his name as a good man, has spread so far that we meet with it to this day in the belief of our Indians, that he is the only white man who ever went or ever will go to heaven.† Transcendent genius is nearly all the French ascribe to Napoleon. Washington was all that the emergency of his country called for. Thus he was and remains a blessing to his country. Was Napoleon all that France required, and was he no more? Did the desires of his genius and personal greatness not present themselves to him as those of France? Even Louis Napoleon has acknowledged on his throne that it must be owned his uncle loved war too much.

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* See Memoirs of Count Miot.

† Mr. Schoolcraft, on page 230 of Notes on the Iroquois, Senate Document 24, 1846, states that this belief of the red men exists to this day—not very complimentary to us, but unfortunately only an exaggeration of that for which there is good ground. The ancient *vae victis* must be changed in the white man's modern history into "Woe to a different color." The white man has shown little sympathy with the other races, and sympathy is the first basis of all idea of justice.

Both Washington and Napoleon have been men of high action, and some points of similarity between them must necessarily exist; but to find them is the work of ingenious research rather than of inquiring candor.

In writing this comparison of the two heroes, we have not felt guilty of undue boldness. To judge of a Napoleon and a Washington does not require a mind equal to either. The faculty of appreciating and enjoying is happily far greater and more common than that of producing and inventing. Goethe says: "It does not require an architect to live in a house." Were it otherwise, did it require a mind like Shakespeare's to appreciate his works, or a Mozart to enjoy a Mozart, or a Paul to be taught by a Paul, men would not stand in need of one another, and, unable to form a society, could have developed no genius or talent among them, could have no history, and our species could not have advanced.

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